

# **EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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## **REMARKS BY**

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**U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh**

**National Defense College**

**December 4, 2011**

Good morning!

I am so very pleased to be here, here at Mirpur Hall addressing the students and staff of both the National Defense College and the Staff College, and to be here in Bangladesh.

I feel at home here at the College as I spent the past year as a professor at the National War College in Washington, D.C. I know the important role of professional military education institutions like NDC, and am deeply honored to have this occasion to share some of my thoughts as I launch my tenure as American Ambassador to Bangladesh.

I also feel at home here in Bangladesh. A decade ago, I served for three years in Bangladesh. During that time my wife and I developed many friendships with Bangladeshis, and our roots went deep into the soil of this beautiful country. As I departed from Bangladesh on June 7, 2001, I told several friends that my dream was to return to Bangladesh some day as ambassador. I laughed at the time, never imagining that such a wild dream could ever come true. When I presented my credentials to His Excellency President Zillur Rahman just over a week ago, I had a tear in my eye as I thanked him for making my dream come true when he accepted my credentials, as signed by President Obama.

I come to Bangladesh with a mandate, a mandate to broaden, deepen and strengthen the bilateral relationship between America and Bangladesh. My team and I will work hard to fulfill this mandate. We will work hard to promote a Bangladesh that is peaceful, secure, prosperous,

healthy and democratic. I believe that such a Bangladesh is in the interests of the people of Bangladesh, of the region and of America.

My teaching at the National War College drove home the importance of strategy and of thinking strategically. So, let me paint the larger picture: Bangladesh fundamentally matters to America; Bangladesh is of strategic importance to America. If you are not sure why Bangladesh matters, let me remind you of a couple of facts. Bangladesh is a huge country. Bangladesh is the 7<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world. It has the 4<sup>th</sup> largest Muslim population in the world. Bangladesh is a secular, moderate, democratic nation. The United States sees Bangladesh as an oasis of political and economic stability in a region that is far from stable. As Bangladesh works to improve its relations with its neighbors, especially India, it becomes even more critical to the region's success. Bangladesh is the largest contributor to international peacekeeping efforts, a huge commitment to stability around the region and around the world.

May I add a personal note? As I said to His Excellency the President, a nation is assessed by its people, by the character of its people. And who are more resilient, more energetic, more dynamic, more creative than the people of Bangladesh? Knowing this country well, I know of what I speak. Bangladesh by this critical measure is truly huge.

And there are so many ties between our nations. Over half a million Bangladeshis now make the United States their home, contributing to our political, civil, economic and social fabric. Thousands more have forged connections through education and other links. Trade between our countries now is over \$5 billion. The U.S. is the largest export market for Bangladesh, the largest investor in Bangladesh, and the third-largest source of overseas remittances.

I could go on and on, but I think I have made my point: Bangladesh truly matters to America. This was most apparent to me when I undertook my consultations in Washington prior to coming to Dhaka. For months, as I went around Washington to various agencies and the Congress, I felt like a rock star. Everyone was eager to meet me ... not because they care much about me, but because they care a lot about Bangladesh.

The relationship between our countries has many dimensions, as I have suggested. I would like to dig a bit deeper into only one of them, the security dimension, as seen from the American perspective. I will save other aspects of the relationship for other occasions.

America seeks to build a strong security partnership with Bangladesh. I believe that this security partnership can promote greater peace and stability in this region and beyond, a goal shared by both nations. I will focus on three important areas of cooperation: counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and global peacekeeping.

**Countering the threat of terrorism is a high priority of both Bangladesh and America.**

I affirm that America will continue to partner with Bangladesh in the fight against terrorism. We support Bangladeshi efforts to build greater capacity to combat terrorism. To this end, we will continue to partner with the Bangladesh Navy Special Warfare and Diving Salvage (SWADS) unit, so it can better protect Bangladesh's maritime borders. We will also continue to partner with the Bangladesh Army Para Commandos as they grow from a battalion to a brigade, so it can better protect Bangladesh's land borders and be capable of acting in a support role for counterterrorism operations. We will support greater interoperability between SWADS and the Coast Guard and Para Commandos as well as those who protect Bangladesh's long land borders. We will continue joint exercises, which increase the preparedness of both militaries.

We will engage with other elements of the Bangladesh security structure beyond the military. We are continuing assistance in helping Bangladesh as it endeavors to strengthen laws and policies on terrorism, to support police effectiveness in working with the communities they protect, to strengthen judicial and prosecutorial processes, to promote rule of law, to develop a strong forensics program, and to track and block terrorist financing. Yes, we will continue to partner with Bangladesh on all of these fronts.

I believe a robust counterterrorism partnership would be most effective if based on a framework that enables greater coordination of U.S. assistance to various elements of the Bangladesh government. Such a framework would increase cooperation and enhance the sharing of critical information. In the weeks and months ahead, I will explore the possibility of concluding such a framework agreement with the Government of Bangladesh.

**Increasing preparedness for responding to and coping with natural disasters is in the interests of both countries.**

We all recall the devastation of the horrific cyclone that hit Bangladesh in 1991. The death toll from that monstrous storm was staggering, but it would have been much higher had the United States and Bangladeshi militaries not worked together to save hundreds of thousands of

lives. Both nations learned well an important lesson, that working together we can save lives. Thus, we continue to engage on how best to respond to disasters. Cyclone Sidr of 2007 taught another lesson, that preparedness saves lives. So many Bangladeshis survived that cyclone by seeking refuge in cyclone shelters. From that lesson, America is partnering with Bangladesh to build hundreds more of these shelters, which serve as schools or community centers when not needed for refuge. We are working with the government to use some of these shelters to support Coastal Crisis Management Centers, which will be equipped to sustain communications and coordinate relief and rescue during and immediately after disasters strike. Through this partnership, Bangladeshis will be better prepared than ever to cope with cyclones, earthquakes and floods. We all can take great pride in this continuing progress.

### **America supports Bangladesh's unmatched engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations.**

As you know well, Bangladesh is the world's largest contributor to international PKO. I understand that Bangladesh is prepared to increase its contributions by 50% over coming years. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon made clear during his recent visit to Bangladesh, the international community values Bangladesh's leading role in supporting global peace through its contributions to UNPKO.

When I was here a decade ago, I witnessed American-Bangladeshi partnership in establishing Bangladesh's PKO training center. I am pleased that America continues to support this center through a range of activities, including an upcoming multilateral PKO exercise, the third of a series, called Shanti Doot 3. My personal support for Bangladesh's engagement in UNPKO is evident by my decision to make visiting BIPSOT a top priority ... I travel there later this week.

There are so many other areas of U.S.-Bangladesh cooperation in the security realm that I could explore this morning, such as our deep continuing engagement to help Bangladesh as it works to further professionalize its military and other elements of its security structure, as it works to strengthen civilian-military relations, as it works to modernize its forces and build its capacity to protect the people of Bangladesh, as it works to foster security by improving the health, education, prosperity and well-being of the Bangladeshi people. Our bilateral partnership is engaged productively on all of these fronts. There is so much more to say, but I know that you have been sitting in those chairs for nearly a year now, and that your thoughts are mostly on your

graduation and next job, or in the case of the Staff College students, defending your individual research papers.

So let me conclude with a final thought about the future of the U.S.-Bangladesh security partnership. I believe this partnership will go from strength to strength. My government is committed to this partnership, as I said at the beginning of my remarks. Not only will we continue and deepen ongoing activities, such as those I just outlined, we will seek new arenas for working together to bolster peace and stability in the region and beyond. As an example, I foresee our working together through the Proliferation Security Initiative to support international efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

America's engagement with the Bangladeshi military is robust. Through continued cooperation in training, joint exercises, technical assistance, provision of equipment, professional military education, and high-level visitor exchanges, this partnership is destined for even greater heights, as evidenced by the visit to Bangladesh later this week by Lieutenant General Francis Wiercinski, the Commanding General of the U.S. Army in the Pacific—just the latest of ongoing senior-level interactions between our militaries.

With that, I close ... ever so thankful for this cherished opportunity to share a few thoughts with you during this, my second week as the fully credentialed Ambassador of the United States to the wonderful nation of Bangladesh

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